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National Library Service
for the Blind and
Physically Handicapped

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Conference photos by Jane Caulton

NLS Materials Development Division chief Michael Katzmman demonstrates the Gutenberg cartridge duplicator for Virginia Beach subregional librarian Ashley Barrineau (left) and Georgia regional librarian Pat Herndon.

New Frontiers!

Technology and accessibility headline NLS national conference in Oklahoma City

Attendees of the National Conference of Librarians Serving Blind and Physically Handicapped Individuals in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, were treated to internationally recognized speakers' perspectives on accessibility and in-depth sessions on the braille and talking-book program's use of new technologies to improve patrons' reading experiences.

Appropriately themed "New Frontiers!," the conference was held May 4–8, with pre-conference workshops on Saturday, May 3, and drew about 200 registrants.

In her opening address, NLS director Karen Keninger said the fundamental goal of NLS is to ensure that "every patron has access to our collections." She continued, "When I was last before you in 2012, I set

The Program

The National Library Service for the Blind and Physically Handicapped, Library of Congress, publishes books and magazines in braille and in recorded form for readers who cannot hold, handle, or see well enough to read conventional print because of a temporary or permanent visual or physical disability.

Through a national network of state and local libraries, the materials are loaned free to eligible readers in the United States and to U.S. citizens living abroad. Materials are sent to readers and returned by postage-free mail. Most books are also available for download on the NLS Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) website, <https://nlsbard.loc.gov>.

Books and Magazines

Readers may borrow all types of popular-interest books including bestsellers, classics, mysteries, westerns, poetry, history, biographies, religious literature, children's books, and foreign-language materials. Readers may also subscribe to more than seventy popular magazines in braille and recorded formats.

Special Equipment

Special equipment needed to play the audiobooks is loaned indefinitely to readers. Amplifiers with headphones are available for eligible readers who are also certified as hearing impaired. Other devices are provided to aid readers with mobility impairments in using playback machines.

Eligibility

You are eligible for the Library of Congress program if

- You are legally blind—your vision in the better eye is 20/200 or less with correcting glasses, or your widest diameter of visual field is no greater than 20 degrees;
- You cannot see well enough or focus long enough to read standard print, although you wear glasses to correct your vision;
- You are unable to handle print books or turn pages because of a physical handicap; or
- You are certified by a medical doctor as having a reading disability, due to an organic dysfunction, which is of sufficient severity to prevent reading in a normal manner.

How to Apply

You may request an application by calling toll-free 1-888-NLS-READ or download one from the NLS website at www.loc.gov/nls.

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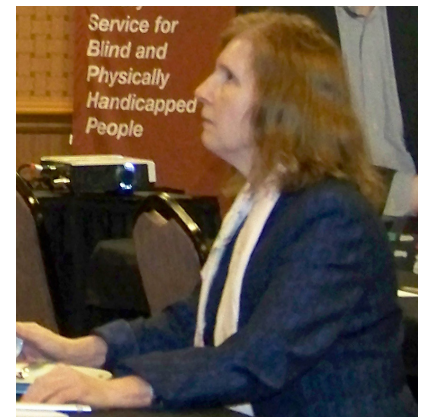
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New Frontiers!



Top (left to right): Phillip Carbo, NLS audiobook production specialist; Paula Bahmani, NLS education and training specialist; and Christopher Mundy, Multistate Center East quality assurance specialist, field questions from network staff about submitting locally produced audiobooks to BARD.

Right: During a breakfast discussion she hosted, NLS director Karen Keninger listens to suggestions about the future of accessible library service.



five primary goals: maintain the high quality of the materials, expand the scope and quantity of titles, leverage technology to enhance the reader experience, promote braille literacy, and increase readership." The conference presentations, she said, would focus on the work that has since been done in these areas.

Keninger explained that reader demand for a wider selection of materials is the basis for two new ventures. "We have entered into agreements with commercial publishers to add their books to the collection." The additions allow NLS to expand the collection quickly and inexpensively, she said. "The goal is to raise materials to the highest possible quality levels and to make them available to our patrons. They want more and they want it faster."

In addition, network libraries may now submit locally produced audio

and braille books to the Braille and Audio Reading Download (BARD) site. While the books will undergo a quality review, it will be less strenuous than what is done for books produced by NLS and its contractors. "We are responding to the needs of our patrons with the resources that we have," Keninger said. But in doing so, "NLS cannot take responsibility for the quality of locally produced materials on BARD."

NLS staff provided more detail on those ventures. Regional conferences and technology user groups also gave presentations and training sessions. Conference attendees heard from speakers on developments related to distribution of accessible books across international borders, improving access for children who are blind or visually impaired, and the role the free library service plays in keeping readers connected to their world.

New Frontiers!

Providing access to all: Conference speakers

The international treaty agreed to in Marrakesh, Morocco, last summer to improve access to copyrighted works for people with visual impairments was the topic of the conference's opening speaker Fredric Schroeder, first vice president of the World Blind Union. Schroeder helped to facilitate the treaty, which he said "seeks to end the book famine for individuals throughout the world who are blind." According to World Health Organization statistics presented by Schroeder, 90 percent of the world's 285 million blind and visually impaired individuals live in developing countries and do not have access to reading materials. "Access is about literacy," he said. "Without literacy, individuals cannot participate in their world."

Schroeder, who is also first vice president of the National Federation of the Blind, explained that the Marrakesh treaty, which has been signed by 64 countries, will allow accessible books such as those produced by NLS to be shared across international borders. The treaty requires countries to adopt laws such as the Chafee Amendment (Public Law 104-197), which authorizes the production and distribution of special-format materials for individuals who are blind, visually impaired, or physi-

cally disabled. (The United States signed the Marrakesh treaty, but it has not yet been ratified.)

Making education accessible for youth was also discussed. Joy Zabala, director of Technical Assistance for the National Center on Accessible Instructional Materials and the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), described the ways her organizations work with students with visual limitations and their parents and teachers to ensure that the youth have the materials needed for success. "I shouldn't have to wait for my social studies book until everyone else is halfway through the course," Zabala said.

Entrepreneur and author Jim Stovall, who lost his sight when he was 29, credited access to talking books and a network library for his success. "I thought I would never leave my room, then you sent me Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Louis L'Amour, and they convinced me that I could do something else," Stovall recalled. He said he reads a book a day and has worn out six audiobook machines since becoming a patron. Stovall wrote *The Ultimate Gift*, which was produced as a movie and became the first book in a trilogy. He has authored more than 25 books and founded the Narrative Television Studio, which provides descriptive narration for television

Members of the Reader Enrollment and Delivery System (READS) user group pay rapt attention to a presentation on expected changes as READS is aligned to integrate with the Patron Information Machine Maintenance System (PIMMS), which launches this fall.



New Frontiers!

programming. “It happened because some guy at the Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped made sure that Hemingway got to my house. How do you say ‘thank you’ for that?”

New frontiers at NLS

Promoting and producing braille. Keninger updated participants on the outcomes of the 2013 Braille Summit held in conjunction with the Perkins School for the Blind at its facility in Watertown, Massachusetts. She said the summit set the foundation for moving forward on the priority of promoting braille literacy. The report, which summarizes options for NLS and the community of braille readers, teachers, and producers, is scheduled for release in July. As reading becomes more digitized and paper more expensive, the report identifies a need for a low-cost braille display. “Research is being conducted in this area,” said the NLS director.

In the meantime, NLS has made electronic braille available on BARD and its smartphone complement, BARD Mobile, and has begun offering locally produced braille books. NLS also is experimenting with adding more tactile books to the collection—a challenge because of the expense and technological requirements.

Judy Dixon, NLS consumer relations officer, explained the new Unified English Braille (UEB) code, which updates the American standard braille code and has been adopted by all English-speaking countries. UEB eliminates nine contractions and uses different spacing rules. The code, which uses the same dot patterns as the American standard, allows braillists to transliterate the symbols used in print. January 4, 2016, is the implementation date for UEB, but “it will be a while before the code shows up in NLS braille materials,” Keninger said.

BARD development. BARD continues to add titles and register users. All new titles in the collection are automatically added to the sys-

tem for download, as are old analog books that have been converted to digital. And in March 2014 NLS invited network libraries to submit their locally produced books and magazines to the website. More than 60,000 patrons and 2,084 institutions have registered for BARD and 10,000 users have registered 17,200 devices for BARD Mobile.

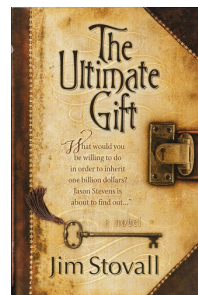
In the coming year, NLS plans to improve the BARD search function, use cloud computing services to speed downloads, and improve braille functionality.

Magazines on Cartridge (MOC) program.

All audio magazines have been moved to cartridges. Patrons who subscribe to multiple magazines may receive cartridges containing several magazine titles. Because the viability of the program depends on cartridge returns, patrons who are more than two cartridges delinquent may have their magazine delivery suspended. Librarians can find MOC training documents on the BARD site.

PIMMS. In June, NLS will begin testing the new system that will eventually replace the Comprehensive Mailing List System (CMLS), which tracks patron information, and the Blind and Physically Handicapped Inventory Control System (BPHICS), which tracks equipment. PIMMS—the Patron Information Machine Maintenance System—will allow libraries to enter all their patron and equipment information in one system, explained Stephen Prine, assistant chief of the Network Division.

Initial testing will begin with regional libraries in Kentucky, North Dakota, and Tennessee. All use the NLS READS system. Beta testing will be done in August. PIMMS is expected to be implemented on October 1. Prine said the network should expect a seamless migration during the transition period, which will run through March 2015. According to Prine, “After the conversion there will be no need for reconciliation processes. The real-time connection will allow library systems to be the authority.”



Conference speaker Jim Stovall's bestseller

New Frontiers!



Mary Lamica, president of the Consortium of User Libraries (CUL), leads a presentation on changes in the CUL circulation system.

Increasing awareness. NLS is developing a plan that will support network library public-education efforts. Joseph Ney of Rein-gold Inc., a communications and marketing firm in Alexandria, Virginia, presented several strategies for participants to review. Target audiences for the coming effort include people who are visually impaired, blind, or have a physical disability that prevents reading; veterans; and seniors. Jane Caulton, head of the Publications and Media Section, explained, "At the last conference, network libraries asked for a national effort and for attention to be given to reaching people with physical disabilities. This project answers that request." Network libraries will be provided guidebooks and materials for the selected strategy.

Network libraries: Public libraries, accessibility, and support groups

Caroline Ashby, New York City regional librarian, and Teresa Faust, Vermont regional librarian, discussed Library Edge, offered by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation at libraryedge.org. The site provides 11 tools that libraries can use to rate their public access technology ser-

vices. Number 11 addresses issues related to accessibility by people who deal with visual and physical challenges. Faust also discussed her efforts to encourage public libraries to remain knowledgeable by distributing e-mail messages, titled "Special Services Nuggets." These messages provide tips on making libraries more accessible, including "using magnifiers, fat pens, microphones, and large print," she said. Faust added that network libraries also could open their doors to other libraries as meeting sites and offer accessibility training.

Accessibility was also the focus of a presentation by Mike Marlin, Northern California regional librarian, and Debbi MacLeod, Colorado regional librarian. They noted that although technology brings new opportunities for assisting people with visual impairments or disabilities to engage with their communities, digital does not always mean accessible.

Sharon Ruda, Illinois regional librarian; Toni Harrell, Kansas regional librarian; Richard Smith, Missouri regional librarian; and Jim Henry, chairperson of the Oklahomans for Special Library Services, discussed the pleasures and perils of library support groups.

New Frontiers!

Days in Oklahoma City were packed with meetings, but there was time after-hours to renew old friendships and make new ones.



New software aids audiobook production

On May 3, nearly 60 network librarians were introduced to the newest tool for NLS audiobook production during a hands-on workshop in Oklahoma City. Three hours later they had created a complete digital talking book (DTB) using the new software.

The new software can be used to author a variety of digital talking-book formats, said Phillip Carbo, NLS audiobook production specialist. It contains all the functionality of a standard digital audio editing tool, but includes specialized features such as auto-level and voice profiler. The system can be used to author digital books in the NLS-standard ANSI/NISO Z39.86 and DAISY 2.02 formats.

Carbo, NLS Engineering Section head John Brown, and Multistate Center East quality assurance specialist Chris Mundy

conducted the workshop as part of the 2014 National Conference of Librarians Serving Blind and Physically Handicapped Individuals.

The new system, the Hindenburg Audio Book Creator (HABC), was originally developed in 2009 as the Hindenburg Journalist, a workstation that enabled radio journalists to produce, record, and edit audio content without the help of an engineer.

Danish company Hindenburg Systems (HS) worked with members of the DAISY Consortium to develop the HABC to support the production of audio files that comply with digital talking-book specifications. The program was

further modified under an NLS contract to produce NLS-format DTBs. Brown had participated in a demonstration of HABC at the 2013 CSUN International Technology and Persons with Disabilities Conference in San Diego. NLS was preparing a solicitation for a book-production tool at the time; HS submitted a bid and was awarded the contract in June 2013.

On September 30, 2013, HS CEO Chris Mottes and creative director Nick Dunkerley visited NLS headquarters in Washington, D.C. “There were a number of concepts that were cleared up because they saw firsthand our workflow for recording, reviewing, and authoring,” Carbo said.

Mottes, Dunkerley, and HS chief technology officer Preben Friis have been working closely with Carbo, Recording Studio head Celeste Lawson, and senior NLS staff since November 2013 via Skype conferences and e-mail exchanges to refine the HABC to fit NLS needs.

The HABC performs all stages of creating an audiobook—a task that NLS previously needed three different programs to complete. “It’s built to our specifications and is not just an off-the-shelf program,” Lawson said.

For example, studio monitors can drop markers in as the book is being recorded, or the reviewer can do it afterward; they do not have to do it in the order the book is read. “You can hop around or even do it finish to start,” Lawson said.

In addition to recording and creating books for the NLS collection, the studio is using the software to produce DTBs of analog-to-digital titles and commercial audiobooks. In the future, the HABC may be used to include e-books in the production process, convert foreign-produced digital talking books to NLS standards, and produce instructional titles for the NLS Music Section. The NLS Engineering Section is currently working on making the HABC accessible for blind users.



Brian Hemmingsen monitors a narrator during a recording session in the NLS studio using the new audiobook creator program.

Subscriber feedback prompts changes in *Talking Book Topics* and *Braille Book Review*

Readers of the NLS magazines *Talking Book Topics* (TBT) and *Braille Book Review* (BBR) have seen two big changes this year. Books now are listed alphabetically by subject, author last name, and title, instead of by book number under fiction and nonfiction categories. And longer book descriptions have returned to TBT.

The modifications were made in response to subscriber feedback and to anticipate the expansion of the scope and number of titles in the collection, a top priority for NLS director Karen Keninger.

Previously, books were announced by book number order in the large-print magazines six times a year, and then a catalog was produced annually or biennially that organized the books by subject. NLS had to change the way books were being announced to make room for more books. At the 2013 NLS Collection Development Advisory Group (CDAG) meeting, chairman Steve Speicher said members would like to see titles organized by subject and the return of longer book descriptions in TBT. To compensate for the extra space those changes would require, CDAG suggested NLS do away with the magazines' indexes.

"After considerable feedback from our patrons and our libraries, we have changed TBT to address patron concerns," Keninger said. "In the past, we've published it with books in numerical order, and as the number of titles increased, we switched to shorter descriptions to get them all in. Patrons wanted it organized by subject, and they also wanted longer annotations. We heard them."

After analyzing the feedback from CDAG and network libraries, Keninger devised a plan for organizing TBT and BBR that would allow subscribers to look up books by their favorite authors and subjects without an index. The indexes took up nearly half the pages in the publications and were a

technical challenge for the desktop publishing software that NLS uses.

The changes alleviate the need for the annual catalog *Digital Talking Books Plus* and the biennial *Braille Books*. The specialty catalog *For Younger Readers*, which lists books for children, will continue to be published.

"We are glad we could respond to our patrons' suggestions and make a better product for them."

—Stephen Prine,
Assistant Chief, Network Division

The January–February issues of TBT and BBR were the first to be published in the new format. Patron reaction has been enthusiastic. Ernie McFadden, who downloads NLS books for his wife Bobbie in Hartwell, Georgia, wrote, "Thank you, thank you, thank you. As someone who downloads two to four-dozen books a month for my wife, who is blind, the new layout is a terrific time-saver for me." Judy Saunders, an overseas patron, wrote, "Congratulations on the new format. Dividing the books into categories is a time-saver, and the book descriptions are much more informative."

However, no longer listing the books by number on the order form made it harder for some users of the audio edition of TBT to order books, so the decision was made to return the order forms to numerical order.

"This compromise of keeping the subject categories and returning the order forms to numerical order is a 'best of both worlds' solution," said Stephen Prine, assistant chief of the Network Division. "We are glad we could respond to our patrons' suggestions and make a better product for them."

Disability rights activist Alhmed El Blassy from Egypt explores an NLS digital talking-book machine.



International visitors learn how NLS makes reading accessible for everyone

International delegations frequently come to NLS to learn how the Library of Congress delivers accessible reading materials to populations who have visual or physical impairments. Librarians and teachers from Japan, Russia, and Egypt who visited this spring are typical of the guests that NLS welcomes year-round.

On March 21, 2014, two visitors from the National Diet Library of Japan in Kyoto toured NLS. “I was so surprised to hear approximately 100 staff in NLS engage in the services for blind and physically handicapped people because in [our library] only three staff engage in these services,” said Sayaka Okumura, a librarian in the National Diet Library’s Digital Library Division.

The difference in the level of service NLS provides for people with visual disabilities is a primary draw for international visitors. Professors and teachers from the

Russian Federation visited NLS on April 1, 2014. The group was part of the Teaching English to Blind and Visually Impaired Students in Russia project that was started four years ago to increase the availability of accessible English-language instruction materials. The project was spearheaded to meet a new Russian requirement for students to learn a second language and for all new instructional materials to be made accessible. Before the project’s launch, English-instruction materials had been very limited and some schools were sharing a single, outdated braille book.

“We specialize in training teachers who teach English as a second language,” said Rimma Gilyazova, an instructor at a school for blind individuals in Bashkortostan. “Our mission for this trip is to develop a course to help teachers in Moscow who are already teaching students who are blind or have visual impairments.”

Gilyazova explained that Moscow has four schools for children who are blind or visually impaired, “but very few experts” in this field.

The Russian professors want to develop a framework for providing their students greater access to English-language learning opportunities via online digital audio and digital braille materials. Stephen Prine, assistant chief of the NLS Network Division, explained that NLS has supported access to digital braille since it developed Web-Braille, an online download service, in the 1990s. Patrons can now access materials via the Braille and Audio Reading Download site (BARD) or the BARD Mobile app (free from the App Store) for the iPhone, iPad, and iPod touch.

Many international delegations see the value of the framework for distribution of accessible materials that NLS has developed over its 83-year history. On April 16, 2014, six disability-rights activist who are working to empower people with disabilities in Egypt through policy, programs, and education visited NLS. They expressed great interest in the laws and procedures

that were used to establish the free library service.

Alhmed El Blassy, a dentist who was blinded in the 2011 Tahrir Square dem-

“I was so surprised to hear approximately 100 staff in NLS engage in the services for blind and physically handicapped people because in [our library] only three staff engage in these services.”

—Sayaka Okumura,
National Diet Library, Japan



Sayaka Okumura (third from left) and Ryoichi Minami (right) of the National Diet Library of Japan talk with Joanna Blatchly (left) and Michelle Spezzacatena (center), NLS staff members who have taught school in Japan.

onstrations and who is now the campaign coordinator for the Egyptian Initiative for Personal Rights, was impressed with the history and development of the digital talkingbook machine and the network of cooperating libraries. He jokingly asked whether it was possible for Egyptians to have access to NLS books and services. Rania Gerge, a coordinator of the Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services in Egypt, asked why NLS was not using e-books as an accessible media. Prine explained that NLS was looking into the use of e-books in conjunction with text-to-speech technologies, but that there were not yet agreements with publishing houses for the use of their materials in this format.

All three groups of international visitors left with a greater awareness of the United States’ commitment to serving those with visual and physical challenges and how NLS strives to leverage technology to improve services for its readers.

NLS Music Blog debuts

The NLS Music Section has arrived in the blogosphere. *NLS Music Notes* is a blog on the Library of Congress website with information about the NLS music collection, interviews, and articles about musicians who are blind or have low vision and music braille transcribers. It will also feature news of current music events and activities. Bloggers include current NLS Music Section staff members and, on occasion, guest contributors. <http://blogs.loc.gov/nls-music-notes/>

BARD adds locally produced audiobooks

Libraries in the NLS network that have successfully completed a pilot program may now submit their locally produced audiobooks to BARD (the Braille and Audio Reading Download site).

“The network libraries put a tremendous amount of effort, resources, and talent into producing talking books to complement the NLS collection,” said NLS director Karen Keninger. “I am thrilled to be able to share them nationwide through BARD. These titles will bring regional color to our collection and will add an otherwise unattainable depth and breadth to the resources NLS can make readily available to patrons through BARD and the network libraries.”

Efforts to bring locally produced books to BARD have been underway for almost two years. “Shortly after Karen was appointed director, I was asked to investigate what would be necessary for BARD to incorporate books already produced by network libraries,” audiobook production specialist Phillip Carbo explained.

He began by looking at the technical specifications that NLS requires its contracted audiobook producers to follow and exploring ways they could be simplified. “Network library recording studios have fewer resources than commercial producers. We don’t expect them to work with professional voice actors or to have the same quality of equipment. We wanted to create a new specification that included only what was absolutely necessary to ensure that their books would work with the encryption software and digital talking-book player.”

A team of NLS employees—including Carbo, education and training specialist Paula Bahmani, research and development officer Neil Bernstein, Engineering Section head John Brown, information technology specialist Hugo Buitano, Material Development Division chief Michael Katzmann, Automation Section head Michael Martys, Quality Assurance Section head Robert

Norton, and Quality Assurance Section assistant head Margaret Goergen Rood—created the new specification and developed a process for network libraries to add those books to BARD. The books need to be correctly formatted, which enables them to be encrypted for use only in NLS-authorized players to comply with U.S. copyright law, but they do not receive any other quality-assurance testing.

Network libraries in Iowa, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, South Carolina, Texas, and Washington State were selected to participate in a pre-pilot test of the new program. Each was asked to submit one book. “We worked closely with the libraries’ recording studios to help them become comfortable with the technical specification,” Carbo explained. By January 2014, six of the seven had uploaded a book to BARD, with titles ranging from *More than Petticoats: Remarkable Massachusetts Women* to *Hand Raised: The Barns of Montana*. The seventh library’s book was accepted in March, and in April the next group of libraries—Idaho, Nebraska, Nevada, Ohio, and Utah—began the pilot phase.

Once libraries have successfully submitted a book through the pilot program, they are cleared for open submission of any audiobooks they choose to contribute to BARD. Locally produced books have the designation “DBC” and can be filtered out by BARD users who prefer only to access titles produced by NLS, but are otherwise just as easy to obtain as other BARD media.

“We hope that all network libraries with recording studios will have completed the pilot phase by this fall,” Carbo said. “And the pilot will remain open if any other libraries choose to begin a recording program. Today, the software and hardware for producing audiobooks are more affordable than ever before. Recording programs are great for libraries: they provide opportunities for press outreach, they pique the interest of volunteers, and of course they bring more books to our patrons.”

“The network libraries put a tremendous amount of effort, resources, and talent into producing talking books to complement the NLS collection. I am thrilled to be able to share them through BARD.”

—Karen Keninger,
NLS director

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Connecting to the conference on Twitter

From May 3 to May 9, around 250 tweets were sent by attendees at the National Conference of Librarians Serving Blind and Physically Handicapped Individuals using the hashtag #nlsokc. “Twitter allowed us to connect everyone in the network with the events and announcements at the conference in real time,” said Publications and Media Section head Jane Caulton. Here is a sampling:

#Plans for next generation player under way. Very exciting times!!! (@kermiefrog)

#NLS Engineering excited about Hindenburg digital talking book recording system. Big step forward (@kermiefrog)

#Up to 1000 new commercial titles coming this year on top of 2200 NLS produced titles. (@kermiefrog)

#A to D conversions in 2012 were 1685 and in 2013 were 4121 and 2014 will be 3500! (@DebbiMacLeod)

#Vickie Collins head of Network Services—80 percent of patrons still get direct mail service even with BARD (@kermiefrog)

#Karen commends local studios for the quality of their audiobooks. (@DebbiMacLeod)

#PIMMS is intended to make things more efficient, no more waiting a week to process patron and machine info (@kermiefrog)

#@judithdixon is a #braille rockstar. (@imallmadhere)

#Never forget that when you send out those boxes with cartridges that it means a whole lot to the folks at the other end (@kermiefrog, quoting speaker Jim Stovall)

#Nls working on new breath switch with more functionality. (@DebbiMacLeod)

#Next conference will be in San Francisco! (@LBPHFLP)

#Karen Keninger’s dog stealing the show during closing remarks. (@CEdininny)

